

TOWARD NEW TONGUES
Nyanda Smith

The gigantic billowing form clings to the wall. Waves of ashen paper coil and tumble, forming ridges and gorges that envelop and resist in turn. Splayed, the amorphous composition sits poised between weight and weightlessness: spatially clouding the built form it extends from.

(un)/fold began as an embodied response to the site – the institution (1). Drawing from Luce Irigaray's concept of 'sexed space' (1985), the work exists as a reply to the architectural monolith's stature representing gendered norms of selfhood and identity.

Ornate constellations of frenetic stitch; winding lattice patterns of puncture marks; malleable and rigid cavernous folds that cavort and coalesce; stiff pleats fanning like sartorial collars. Monochrome shades evoke both culture and biology: tones of razed land, tar, lace and pelts. *(un)/fold* performs a stage for heterogeneous shifting symbolism, offered up for an audience to witness.

Roux responds to the call from philosophers and writers including Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Elizabeth Grosz, for new articulatory approaches that sit beyond the singular, dualist conceptions forming our cultural philosophical bedrock.

(un)/fold supplies an 'in-between space' (Irigaray, 1985), a site of negotiation where dichotomies agitate and conflate, resisting uniformity. Paired binaries converge to be, all at once, *both*, 'double' (Irigaray, 1985): depth *and* surface; reason *and* emotion; substance *and* fragility. Expression is not confined to a single domain – a dance between the two is performed, resulting in 'indefinite, infinite' readings (Irigaray, 1985, p. 299).

In representing ambivalence, plurality, *Otherness* (Irigaray, 1985), *(un)/fold* offers a quiet resistance to dominant power structures (Lacan's 'Symbolic Order'); male knowledges and paradigms dependent on singularity (Grosz, 1994). Through articulating multiplicitous terrains, the work reflects Roux's process of self-inquiry of an embodied female subjectivity that is both psychic and corporeal.

I am addressing the female body as an experience in space.

Roux' practice is one of cyclical repetition, where material is intuitively and reflexively worked, undone, and reworked again. Reiterative rhythmic actions of folding, puncturing and stitching – by hand and machine – are used to probe the permanence and pliability of matter.

Material – paper, thread, ink, polish, metal – becomes plastic: untethered and released from standards or function. To sculpture, photography and metal-work, Roux adds techniques from technical dressmaking (patterning, sewing, pleating, smocking), honouring female labour traditions and her own lived narrative. The transformation of these techniques shifts the signification of conventional cultural production. Through deconstruction, construction is exposed and new information revealed, before being reconstructed anew.

A concept from physics of *yielding*, of giving in under pressure (Malabou, 2017), is harnessed by Roux, both as actor and receiver. The artist cedes to the material, committing to whatever may emerge from beneath the surface; and simultaneously acts as a deliberate source of pressure, manipulating material through touch. What remains are the products – constructions, refuses, traces – from this activity.

(un)/fold - Susan Roux
HEREANDNOW19: MATERIAL CULTURE
Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery

I transform the inside as outside.

For Roux, surface is both an entry point to exploration, and an object of meaning in its own right. This inquiry parallels Grosz' (1994) model of corporeality and subjectivity as intertwined – as a Möbius strip – where exteriority and interiority flip and twist, ever-producing each other. As Roux' needle punctures the surface of the paper the underside is brought to the fore, the work is both outer and inner.

The mark is paradoxical – it simultaneously tears and repairs. The needle pokes the surface of the paper, almost teasing it; and at the same time, repairs it with thread.

Through reiterative actions of folding and marking, Roux demarcates sections and zones upon the surface. These inscriptions, patterns and grooves are successively up-ended as motions are reversed, and access points removed. The title *(un)/fold*, gestures to this double-action: of both doing and undoing; of calling attention to the nebulousness of knowability, and to the transformative power of voicing new tongues.

- 1) The work began with Roux conducting a close walk around the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery building to inform a spatial and temporal reading. The purpose-built gallery was opened in 1990, and designed by established Western Australian architect Gus Ferguson.
- 2) Grosz, E. (1994). *Volatile bodies*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- 3) Irigaray (1985). *Speculum of the other woman*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- 4) Malabou, C. (2005). *Plasticity at the dusk of writing: Dialectic, destruction, deconstruction*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- 5) Malabou, C. (2017, August). *The relation between habit and the fold* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EglV1eVTrpU>
- 6) Rawes, P. (2007). *Irigaray for architects*. New York, NY: Routledge.